

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) issued the following statement in support of Cook County Public Defender Abishi C. Cunningham's call to bar the State from trying death penalty cases without sufficient funding to defend the poor in these potentially capital cases.

"We can't try to impose the ultimate penalty of death without providing people who cannot afford their own attorney the adequate public resources to defend themselves," said Rep. Quigley. "It flies in the face of not only our Constitution, but our moral compass. Especially given our history of wrongful convictions, we should not be gambling with life and death. Along with Judge Cunningham, I encourage leadership at the State level to find a way fund these essential services, or temporarily take the death penalty off the table."

Judge Cunningham stated at a press conference earlier today that the worsening cycle of deficits has created a situation in which State funding for the Capital Litigation Trust Fund for incoming cases has already been committed to pay outstanding bills. According to Cunningham, his office represents approximately 120 clients (more than 90% of those accused in capital cases in Cook County), but does not have the resources to handle the caseload, noting that capital cases are particularly expensive to investigate, defend, or prosecute.

Rep. Quigley will be addressing the House Judiciary Committee on this issue further tomorrow morning.

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